

Attitude of Pakistani Muslims toward Banned Controversial Advertisements

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Abstract

Advertising is a complete process of communication, and it plays an essential role and develops the strongest link between advertisers and their target audience. But, some advertisements are considered controversial because of the content or product, and they may generate negative responses. Religious and social restrictions did not give enough leeway for creative freedom. The main objective of this study is to find out the attitude of Pakistani Muslims toward controversial advertisements. Data were collected from the 525 Pakistanis using a cross-sectional study design. The study adopted convenience sampling through the personally-administered method. Findings of the study show that the overall attitude of Pakistani Muslims toward controversial advertisements is negative, and respondents do not like controversial advertisements.

Key Words: Attitude, Pakistani Muslims, Controversial Advertisements.

Introduction

Advertising is one of the most important elements of the marketing mix because advertising includes language and images. These two components of advertising (language and images) play an essential role and develop the strongest link between advertisers and their target audience. Languages and images in advertising not only help to convey messages with ease, but they also have cultural context and language itself is a part of the culture. Therefore, marketers, advertisers and researchers give great importance to culture while working on advertising. Culture always considered when advertisers develop strategies or implement strategies, and they always remain careful that advertising should not cross-cultural and legal boundaries, and advertising should not offend any ethnic, racial or religious group (Fereidouni 2008).

Different scholars in the advertising field worked on theological perspectives on advertising, and they also focused on advertising ethics. Some scholars argue that the theological perspective of advertising and ethics is a subject of theological studies, but other scholars commented that the theological perspective of advertising and ethics is also a subject of advertising because they influence the attitude and behavior of their receiver, and they also have an impact on society and the economy. For example, Waller and Fam (2000) conducted studies in Australia and Malaysia, respectively, on advertisements, controversial product and offensive execution. Research work determined the list of controversial products and also dug out factors that make any product controversial, and they also explored the influence of religious beliefs (Christianity, Buddhism, Islam and non-religious Believers) to increase offensiveness. The results of the study indicated that religion has an effect on the attitude of viewers about controversial products and their advertisements.

Wells, Burnett and Moriarty (2006) said, “to create ads that work, advertisers must understand how consumers behave and they must be sensitive to their needs. The implicit goal of advertising is to persuade the

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consumer to do something, often to purchase a product. To achieve this goal, advertisers must first understand their audience. They must learn about consumers' ways of thinking, the factors that motivate them and the environment in which they live. Consumers are affected by many internal and external influences, internal meaning things within themselves and external meaning things outside themselves. Every pattern of human behavior has exceptions. Advertisers should prepare for these exceptions but stay focused on the overall pattern. For example, most people are tolerant of ads containing sexual content, yet there are still people who find such ads offensive; so advertisers should create ads with these differences in mind”.

[Kubacka \(2012\)](#) mentioned that it is important to emphasize that advertising does not mean just selling products, but it also develops trends and tastes and also influence the lifestyles of people, and it combines the people of different parts of the world by giving global ideas. The major role of advertising is to generate awareness about a brand or product in such a way that the audience will always remember the product and will never forget it. Promoting company, brand, and product is also an important function of advertising, and it is found successful in this respect. To create ads that work, advertisers must understand how consumers behave, and they must be sensitive to their needs ([Wells, Burnett & Moriarty, 2006](#)).

Some advertisements are considered controversial because of the content of advertisements like obscenity or vulgarity makes them controversial, or sometimes the nature of the product which is advertised make the advertisements controversial like advertisements of condoms, and such type of controversial products may generate negative responses. Past studies named such controversial products as “unmentionables”, “socially sensitive products”, and “controversial products” ([Fereidouni 2008](#)).

Akhter, Abassi and Umar (2011) said advertisements that contain sexual matter which cannot be discussed in society openly and freely by the general public considered controversial. It develops a negative sense in the eyes of viewers, and it also creates a sense of offensiveness about that particular advertisement and products or brands that are portrayed in such advertisements (Akhter, Abassi, and Umar 2011). Religious values also play an important role in developing and shaping the perceptions, attitudes and behaviors of the individuals ([Qamar et al. 2014](#)). According to the study conducted by [Fam, Waller, and Erdogan \(2004\)](#), they propose that religion greatly affects the information processing of the advertisement by an individual. The effects of religion on the advertising of controversial products remain largely unstudied to date. [Allam \(2013\)](#) also stated that future studies should be conducted to explore the relationship between religion and advertisements of controversial products.

Research Question

What is the attitude of Pakistani Muslims toward controversial banned advertisements?

Literature Review

[Wilson and West \(1981\)](#) described them as “products, services, or concepts that for reasons of delicacy, decency, morality, or even fear tends to elicit reactions of distaste, disgust, offence, or outrage when mentioned or when openly presented”. [Waller \(2005\)](#) defines “controversial ads as advertising that, by the type of product or execution, can elicit reactions of embarrassment, distaste, disgust, offence, or outrage from a segment of the population when presented”.

[Dahl, Frankenberger & Manchandra \(2003\)](#) suggested that “offensive advertising is an act and a process that violates the norm. Offensive advertising includes messages that violate laws and customs, moral or social code”.

Religion can be seen in two vastly different perspectives, i.e., an association of one with a particular religion and commitment of one with religion ([Patel 2012](#)). Another example of the theological perspective of advertising is research by [Rice and Al-Mossawi \(2002\)](#) on the implications of Islam for advertising messages. The findings of the study indicated that Muslims share the same beliefs and attitudes of Muslims about the advertisements will be the same irrespective of geography. [Fam et al. \(2004\)](#) conducted research in six different countries to determine the relation of religion and attitude toward the advertisements of controversial products. The statistical analysis of the study showed that there are some significant differences between the religious groups, which can have important implications for global marketers.

[Waller, Fam and Erdogan \(2005\)](#) conducted another study to explore the reasons for being offended through the exposure of advertisements of controversial products by viewers of four different countries Turkey, the U.K.,

Malaysia and New Zealand. Analysis of the study indicates that religion plays an important role in influencing attitudes of people about advertisements of controversial products, and results also point that geography is not a major determinant of attitudes. [An and Kim \(2006\)](#) found in their study that culture and religion affect attitudes towards the socially sensitive advertisements of controversial products and that are perceived as social ills with negative impacts on society and have less acceptance in society, especially in Muslim society.

According to a study by [Waller, Deshpande and Erdogan \(2013\)](#), marketers and advertisers use offensive advertisements deliberately because of getting public attention about their advertisements and products or brand, and they also use such advertisements for increasing their sales. Offensive advertisements provide them benefit, but they also create complaints by the general public and regulatory bodies as well and also criticized because of the negative effects on society.

[Waller et al. \(2013\)](#) conducted a study on nine hundred and thirty students who belong to six different countries. The purpose of the research was to identify the influence of personal and attitudinal variables on attitudes toward offensive advertisements. The findings of the study revealed that sex, geographic location, economic condition, the intensity of religious beliefs and products produce the strongest reaction. They also suggested that advertisers should be aware of the sensitivity of the product and content which they are going to advertise because they have to face a strong reaction.

Research work determined the list of controversial products and also dug out factors that make any product controversial, and they also explored the influence of religious beliefs (Christianity, Buddhism, Islam and non-religious Believers) to increase offensiveness. The results of the study indicated that religion has an effect on the attitude of viewers about controversial products and their advertisements.

Methodology

This study follows a quantitative method, and a cross-sectional study was conducted by using the questionnaire as the instrument for data collection. This study is unique in its nature because the major focus of the research is to find out the attitude of Pakistani Muslims who belong to different sects of Islam toward controversial advertisements which were banned by the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) in 2016. So, according to the need and nature of the study, Pakistani Muslims are the unit of analysis for this current study.

According to the nature and sensitivity of the current study, “convenience sampling” technique was used to approach respondents and get data. This study operationally defines attitude toward controversial advertisements as predispositions in response to a favorable manner or unfavorable manner by Pakistani Muslims toward controversial advertisements. Following Fifteen items for measuring attitude toward advertisements were adapted from [\(Butt and Run 2012; Henthorne, LaTour, and Nataraajan 1993\)](#) with five-point Likert-type scale (1= Strongly Disagree; 2= Disagree; 3= Moderate; 4= Agree; 5= Strongly agree).

- i. The advertisements are appropriate.
- ii. The advertisements are easy to understand.
- iii. The advertisements are good.
- iv. The advertisements are informative.
- v. The advertisements are very meaningful.
- vi. The advertisements are very realistic.
- vii. The advertisements are very persuasive.
- viii. The advertisements are objective.
- ix. The advertisements are appealing to my individual values.
- x. The advertisements are interesting.
- xi. The advertisements are distinctive.
- xii. The advertisements are pleasant.
- xiii. The advertisements are exiting.
- xiv. The advertisements are inappropriate.
- xv. The advertisements are offensive.

Findings and Analysis

The data used for this research was collected from Pakistanis Muslims who belong to different sects of Islam. A total of 530 respondents were approached to collect data personally by using the convenience sampling technique. 5 questionnaires were found incomplete and were excluded from this study; only 525 questionnaires were used for further analysis.

Table 1. The attitude of Pakistani Muslims toward Advertisements

		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Moderate	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Persuasive	Deoband	4.4%	9.3%	4.6%	5.7%	1.1%	25.1%
	Brelvi	3.4%	8.6%	10.5%	5.1%	3.2%	30.9%
	Ahle Hadith	.6%	1.5%	.8%	3.0%	.0%	5.9%
	Shia	.8%	1.1%	2.1%	1.5%	.0%	5.5%
	Other	7.0%	5.7%	8.2%	10.5%	1.1%	32.6%
	Total	16.2%	26.3%	26.1%	25.9%	5.5%	100.0%
Objective	Deoband	6.7%	6.1%	6.9%	5.1%	.4%	25.1%
	Brelvi	4.8%	10.5%	8.4%	5.7%	1.5%	30.9%
	Ahle Hadith	.8%	1.1%	2.1%	1.9%	.0%	5.9%
	Shia	.4%	1.7%	1.9%	1.5%	.0%	5.5%
	Other	9.3%	7.0%	12.0%	3.0%	1.1%	32.6%
	Total	21.9%	26.5%	31.2%	17.3%	3.0%	100.0%
Meaningful	Deoband	5.7%	7.4%	6.5%	4.2%	1.3%	25.1%
	Brelvi	2.9%	8.4%	9.5%	8.0%	2.1%	30.9%
	Ahle Hadith	.6%	.0%	3.6%	1.7%	.0%	5.9%
	Shia	.4%	1.1%	1.7%	1.7%	.6%	5.5%
	Other	7.4%	7.0%	11.0%	5.9%	1.1%	32.6%
	Total	17.0%	24.0%	32.4%	21.5%	5.1%	100.0%
Realistic	Deoband	6.9%	6.3%	9.1%	2.1%	.8%	25.1%
	Brelvi	5.7%	11.6%	8.2%	3.8%	1.5%	30.9%
	Ahle Hadith	.0%	1.7%	2.9%	1.3%	.0%	5.9%
	Shia	1.3%	2.5%	1.3%	.4%	.0%	5.5%
	Other	8.2%	6.7%	11.4%	5.5%	.8%	32.6%
	Total	22.1%	28.8%	33.0%	13.1%	3.0%	100.0%
Individual Values	Deoband	8.8%	7.2%	5.3%	3.4%	.4%	25.1%
	Brelvi	6.3%	9.3%	9.7%	4.0%	1.5%	30.9%
	Ahle Hadith	1.7%	1.3%	1.9%	1.0%	.0%	5.9%
	Shia	.4%	2.1%	.4%	2.7%	.0%	5.5%
	Other	7.6%	11.2%	9.5%	4.2%	.0%	32.6%
	Total	24.8%	31.2%	26.9%	15.2%	1.9%	100.0%
Interesting	Deoband	10.7%	7.8%	3.0%	1.7%	1.9%	25.1%
	Brelvi	12.2%	8.6%	7.8%	1.1%	1.1%	30.9%
	Ahle Hadith	1.1%	1.9%	1.7%	.6%	.6%	5.9%
	Shia	1.9%	1.5%	.4%	.4%	1.3%	5.5%
	Other	17.3%	9.1%	4.4%	1.7%	.0%	32.6%
	Total	43.2%	29.0%	17.3%	5.5%	5.0%	100.0%
Distinctive	Deoband	11.8%	6.1%	1.7%	2.7%	2.9%	25.1%
	Brelvi	13.1%	6.5%	5.9%	3.6%	1.7%	30.9%
	Ahle Hadith	1.7%	.4%	.8%	2.1%	1.0%	5.9%
	Shia	2.7%	1.7%	.0%	.8%	.4%	5.5%
	Other	16.0%	7.6%	5.7%	1.3%	1.9%	32.6%

Pleasant	Total	45.3%	22.3%	14.1%	10.5%	7.8%	100.0%
	Deoband	16.0%	5.0%	2.7%	.8%	.8%	25.1%
	Brelvi	14.1%	7.6%	6.3%	1.7%	1.1%	30.9%
	Ahle Hadith	3.2%	1.3%	1.3%	.0%	.0%	5.9%
	Shia	1.7%	2.5%	.0%	.0%	1.3%	5.5%
	Other	17.7%	7.8%	5.7%	.6%	.8%	32.6%
Exciting	Total	52.8%	24.2%	16.0%	3.0%	4.0%	100.0%
	Deoband	16.8%	3.6%	2.9%	1.1%	.8%	25.1%
	Brelvi	14.1%	7.0%	4.0%	3.8%	1.9%	30.9%
	Ahle Hadith	2.9%	1.1%	1.5%	.4%	.0%	5.9%
	Shia	3.0%	1.1%	.4%	.4%	.6%	5.5%
	Other	17.5%	8.8%	4.8%	1.1%	.4%	32.6%
Appropriate	Total	54.3%	21.7%	13.5%	6.9%	3.6%	100.0%
	Deoband	7.4%	6.7%	7.8%	3.2%	.0%	25.1%
	Brelvi	5.7%	8.6%	9.3%	5.7%	1.5%	30.9%
	Ahle Hadith	1.1%	2.5%	.8%	1.5%	.0%	5.9%
	Shia	.4%	2.7%	1.7%	.8%	.0%	5.5%
	Other	9.5%	9.1%	6.5%	6.5%	1.0%	32.6%
Understand	Total	24.2%	29.5%	26.1%	17.7%	2.5%	100.0%
	Deoband	3.0%	5.5%	7.2%	6.9%	2.5%	25.1%
	Brelvi	3.4%	7.2%	5.5%	10.3%	4.4%	30.9%
	Ahle Hadith	.4%	.0%	2.5%	3.0%	.0%	5.9%
	Shia	.0%	1.5%	1.7%	1.3%	1.0%	5.5%
	Other	4.6%	8.2%	6.9%	9.1%	3.8%	32.6%
Good	Total	11.4%	22.5%	23.8%	30.7%	11.6%	100.0%
	Deoband	8.4%	6.5%	6.9%	2.7%	.8%	25.1%
	Brelvi	7.0%	7.4%	11.8%	3.4%	1.1%	30.9%
	Ahle Hadith	1.9%	1.9%	1.5%	.6%	.0%	5.9%
	Shia	.4%	2.3%	2.3%	.6%	.0%	5.5%
	Other	9.0%	11.8%	8.0%	2.7%	1.1%	32.6%
Informative	Total	26.7%	29.9%	30.5%	9.9%	3.0%	100.0%
	Deoband	4.2%	5.9%	5.7%	7.6%	1.7%	25.1%
	Brelvi	4.8%	6.3%	9.3%	8.8%	1.7%	30.9%
	Ahle Hadith	.4%	1.0%	2.3%	2.3%	.0%	5.9%
	Shia	.0%	1.9%	2.5%	1.1%	.0%	5.5%
	Other	8.0%	8.2%	7.0%	6.7%	2.7%	32.6%
Inappropriate	Total	17.3%	23.2%	26.9%	26.5%	6.1%	100.0%
	Deoband	4.2%	5.3%	5.1%	7.6%	2.9%	25.1%
	Brelvi	5.0%	6.3%	7.0%	10.1%	2.5%	30.9%
	Ahle Hadith	.4%	3.6%	.0%	1.1%	.8%	5.9%
	Shia	.0%	2.5%	.4%	1.7%	1.0%	5.5%
	Other	7.6%	4.2%	9.5%	7.6%	3.6%	32.6%
Offensive	Total	17.1%	21.9%	22.1%	28.2%	10.7%	100.0%
	Deoband	4.4%	4.0%	7.6%	6.3%	2.9%	25.1%
	Brelvi	4.8%	5.3%	8.2%	8.6%	4.0%	30.9%
	Ahle Hadith	.8%	3.2%	.6%	.6%	.8%	5.9%
	Shia	.6%	1.5%	1.3%	1.3%	.8%	5.5%
	Other	5.7%	6.5%	9.9%	7.0%	3.4%	32.6%
Total	16.2%	20.6%	27.6%	23.8%	11.8%	100.0%	

Table 1 shows that 26.3% of Pakistani Muslims disagree with the statement that controversial advertisements are persuasive, while 25.9% of Pakistani Muslims agree with the statement. 26.5% of Pakistani Muslims disagree with the objectiveness of controversial advertisements; on the other side, 17.3% of Pakistani Muslims believe that controversial advertisements are objective.

Respondents also responded about the meaningfulness of controversial advertisements, 24% of Pakistani Muslims are disagree, but 21.5% of people agree that controversial advertisements are meaningful. Data also represents that 28.8% of Pakistani Muslims do not agree that controversial advertisements are realistic; only 13.1% of respondents agree that controversial advertisements are realistic.

Moreover, Table presents that 31.2% of Pakistani Muslims disagree that controversial advertisements appeal to their individual values, while 15.2% of respondents agree with the statement. 45.3% of Pakistani Muslims showed strong disagreement that controversial advertisements are interesting, only 5% of Pakistani Muslims said they found controversial advertisements as interesting.

Responses of Pakistani Muslims reveal that 45.3% responded are strongly disagree that controversial advertisements are distinctive; an insignificant portion of respondents, 7.8%, strongly agrees with the statement. 52.8 also responded that they strongly disagree with the statement that controversial advertisements are pleasant; just a minor percentage of 4% of respondents strongly agree with it.

Furthermore, Pakistani Muslims who belong to different sects of Islam strongly disagree with the point that controversial advertisements are exciting; on the other side, just 3.6% of Pakistani Muslims strongly agree with the point that they found controversial advertisements exiting. 29.5% of Pakistani Muslims disagree about the appropriateness of controversial advertisements, while 17.7% of respondents found controversial advertisements as appropriate in agreement.

Also, the findings of the study represent that 22.5% of Pakistani Muslims disagree that controversial advertisements are easily understandable, but a bigger number of respondents, 30.7% agrees that controversial advertisements are easily understandable. Responses also indicate that 26.7% of Pakistani Muslims strongly disagree with the statement that controversial advertisements are good; only 3% of respondents responded that they strongly agree that controversial advertisements are good.

Additionally, results reveal that 23.2% of Pakistani Muslims disagree that controversial advertisements are informative, but a larger number of 26.5% of Pakistani Muslims believe that controversial advertisements are informative. 28.2% of Pakistani Muslim respondents agree that controversial advertisements are inappropriate, and 23.8% of respondents found controversial advertisements as offensive.

Overall findings of the study show that Pakistani Muslims have a negative attitude toward controversial advertisements. These findings also support the study finding of [Ammar, Khan, Ahmad and Zafar \(2014\)](#).

Dr. Sarmad, the MD of Marketing and Advertising Sales Jung Media Group, said, "Clients are not bold enough, neither are the media groups when it comes to certain categories of advertising like contraceptive products, media hesitate and tend to shy away fearing a backlash from fundamentalist groups. In ads featuring women models, agencies and clients are forced to be conscious not to hurt popular and religious sentiments". "Cultural sensitivities are important for us, and agencies are conscious of that," states the president of Advertising Association of Pakistan, Imran Syed ([Pande & Bhushan, 2011](#)).

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